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ABSTRACT

Internet job banks have grown into a huge, global employment exchange. More than 1 million job openings are now advertised on 5,000 Internet sites. Employers can fill jobs faster and at less expense; job seekers can circulate resumes cost-free to employers across the country. Employment tools for job-seekers range from job listings to career development aids. Lists are organized by states, occupations, and industries. Employment sites work in different ways: inviting people to "post" their resume by filling out an online electronic form, providing job-search help, or notifying job-seekers automatically when an opening in their field comes up. Most job bank services are free. Using a job bank does not require technical expertise, since most contain instructions for exploring their sites. Through the Internet job seekers can gain insights into a prospective employer's needs and use corporate home pages to find information about prospective employers. America's Job Bank, a project of the U.S. Labor Department, is the largest service. It has the potential to create a national job market. The U.S. Employment Service funds "Internet access zones" to provide access to computers. The other "Big Six" job banks are as follows: Online Career Center, Career Path, Career Mosaic, E-Span, and Monster Board. Drawbacks to job hunting on the Internet are loss of privacy, lack of the personal touch, and the size of the Internet employment market. (YLB)

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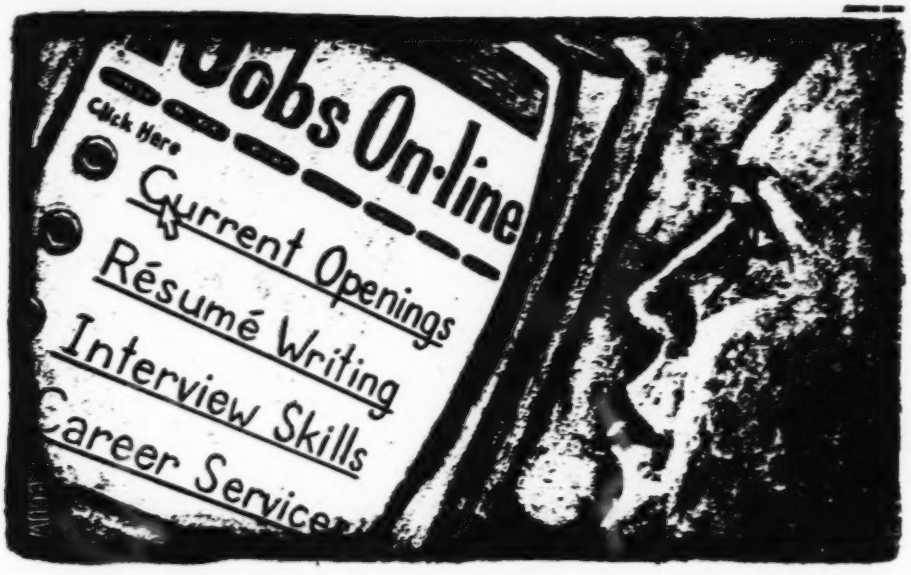

Looking for work in all the right places

Cyberspace offers job opportunities

BY ROBERT LEWIS

Need a job? Just sit down at your computer.

That's what thousands of job-hunting Americans are doing every day, and getting sometimes amazing results, as Robert Thompson discovered recently to his delight.

When Thompson started his job search last fall he got no leads from newspaper want ads. Then an article about job sites on the Internet led him to post his résumé in cyberspace—and his phone wouldn't stop ringing.

"At least 70 companies called," says Thompson, 52, a computer engineer from Birmingham, Ala. He very quickly accepted an offer from Federal Express and in March moved to Castle Rock, Colo. "I found that most big companies are using recruiters to scan the Internet" to dig up new employees.

His experience was no quirk. From a modest start in the 1980s as a place for engineers

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to swap job tips, Internet job banks have grown into a huge, global employment exchange.

More than 1 million job openings are now advertised on 5,000 Internet sites, estimates John Sumser, editor of Electronic Recruiting News, an online newsletter. And the number of sites is growing "on the order of 20 to 50 new places a day," he says.

All kinds of jobs are on display, from bank tellers to bookkeepers, translators to truck drivers, nannies to nurses. Economics is driving the stampede into cyberspace. Employers can fill jobs faster and at less expense. job-seekers can circulate résumés cost-free to employers across town or across the country.

No one knows how many jobs are being filled via cyberspace. But experts agree the Internet is a powerful new search tool that's changing the way the job market works.

"The amount of information [on the Internet] pertaining to career development and job recruiting has just exploded," says Larry Elliott, managing partner of executive recruiters Heidrick and Struggles.

Not all job-seekers are rushing into cyberspace. Some people dislike the impersonality of the Net, or are simply reluctant to put information about themselves on public display. Nor does the Internet, critics say, reveal the "hidden" job market (the world of unadvertised openings) any more fully than conventional information sources.

Caveats aside, hundreds of major companies, including Boeing, IBM, Ford, Gannett and Citicorp, now list job openings on their Web sites.

With a few strokes at their keyboards, job-seekers can find employment tools ranging from job listings to career development aids. They can find lists organized by states, by occupations, by industries, by just about any category.

"You can find employment data bases for Asian Americans, Latino lawyers or Ivy League graduates," says Bob Stirling, vice president of Imcor, which uses the Internet to recruit executives for temporary assignments.

Employment sites work in different ways. Some invite people to "post" their résumé by filling out an online electronic form that is then submitted to a searchable data base. Some also provide job-search help, such as advice on résumé writing or interviewing.

Still others will automatically notify job-seekers when an opening in their field comes up. Of particular importance: Most job bank services are free; employers or recruiting firms usually pay job bank costs.

In the case of the largest service, America's Job Bank, taxpayers foot its $4.5 million annual tab. AJB is a service of the U.S. Labor Department and state employment agencies.

Moreover, using a job bank doesn't require technical expertise. Most job banks contain instructions for exploring their sites. Then, through "hyperlinks," job-seekers can click their way through cyberspace from one employment bank to another.

'You can discover what industry is really looking for.'

LARRY ELLIOTT

Using the Internet to search for a job has other advantages.

Most employees can't hunt for a new job while at work. That's no problem for the Internet, which can be accessed 24 hours a day, 365 days a year.

Close study of Internet job sites gives insights into a prospective employer's needs. "You can discover what industry is really looking for," says Elliott. "You can get a feel for where the jobs are and what it takes to be qualified."

In preparing for a job interview, corporate home pages on the Internet can be a gold mine of information about a prospective employer. It allows a job applicant to walk into an interview armed with information about a company's goals and plans.

Because computer experience is an increasingly important job criterion, applying for work on the Internet shows at least some computer literacy. "The first thing you demonstrate when you apply for a job on the Internet," says Sumser, "is a knowledge and familiarity with computers. That's important."

Margaret Riley, author of "The Guide to Internet Job Searching" (NTC Publishing, 1996) recommends that be-

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ginners start by checking out the "Big Six" job banks. In addition to AJB, they are Career Mosaic, Career Path, E-Span, Monster Board and Online Career Center. [See box below for their addresses.]

AJB boasts 600,000 job openings offered by 9,500 employers and recruiting firms and also provides direct hyperlinks to 1,354 employer Web sites, and 450 other job banks and private employment agencies on the Internet. This means that a job-seeker can jump from AJB directly into, say, IBM's job bank.

The Labor Department's Richard Hardin, an official of the U.S. Employment Service, says AJB averages 20,000 job searches a day. He has no way of knowing how many people find jobs through AJB, but he believes Ray Tennancour's experience is typical.

Caught up in a layoff, Tennancour, 47, of Phoenix, early this year applied for unemployment compensation and was given, among other forms, AJB's Internet address. "I did a few searches and within hours had over 25 openings in my field (servicing electronic equipment) in the six states I was interested in," Tennancour says.

"I sent my résumé to 20 [places] and got 12 responses. I called one in Colorado and was hired," he says.

The AJB, Hardin believes, has the potential to create a national job market, a development that could smooth out regional fluctuations in jobless rates.

Because many job-seekers lack access to computers, Hardin's agency funds "Internet access zones" at universities, community colleges and some 1,800 state employment offices. Internet searches also can be conducted on computers at public libraries.

Federal and state employment agencies also are developing a résumé bank that will provide job-seekers a free site on the Internet to post their résumés. Called America's Talent Bank, it was scheduled to go online in Michigan in April and will spread to 25 states by Labor Day and to all states next year, Hardin says.

Among the other large job sites, Online Career Center [OCC] was founded five years ago by six corporations as a sort of Internet cooperative. Today nearly 2,500 employers advertise their job openings on OCC, including such companies as Marriott, Circuit City, Federal Express, Chrysler, McDonnell Douglas, Intel, Federal Reserve, Bell South, Union Carbide and the U.S. Army.

Career Path is unique in that it consists of the help-wanted ads from 28 major newspapers.

In the beginning, technical jobs, particularly those involving computers, dominated the Internet. But Riley, author of the Internet job guide, says this is changing. The ratio of technical to nontechnical jobs, she estimates, is now close to 50–50.

A random search of jobs posted on Online Career Center, for example, showed openings for 182 secretaries, 99 chemists, 94 attorneys, 171 editors, 600 assemblers, 189 nurses and 56 bus drivers.

Employers like the Internet for hiring because it's fast, efficient and, compared to newspaper advertising, inexpensive.

"Eighteen months ago I spent $5,000 a month on newspaper advertising," says Paula Watkins, who operates a recruiting firm in Anniston, Ala. "Now I spend $1,200 a year for an ad in Online Career Center and do no newspaper advertising at all."

For that, her recruiting message appears on the Internet 365 days a year. It generates 175 to 200 responses a week. In addition, she retrieves job applicants' résumés from the Internet and stores them in her own computer.

So many companies use this method to sift through résumés, in fact, that the rules for writing résumés are changing. Employers increasingly want résumés that are free of special graphics, such as boldface lines, italics, dashes and similar characters.

Words that express a skill or achievement are preferred over job titles. Some applicants include a keyword paragraph to help ensure that their résumés are noticed.

Make the jump to cyberspace

Here are the World Wide Web addresses of the six major job banks:

- America's Job Bank—www.ajb.dni.us
- Career Mosaic—www.careermosaic.com
- Career Path—www.careerpath.com
- E-Span—www.espan.com
- Monster Board—www.monster.com
- Online Career Center—www.occ.com

AARP's WebPlace at www.aarp.org/bulletin/webjobs has additional job bank listings with hyperlinks.

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But job hunting on the Internet isn't without drawbacks. Chief among them is the loss of privacy. Sending a résumé into cyberspace places highly personal information in the hands of strangers. "Unless you're careful every Tom, Dick and Harry can look at your résumé," says Stirling, the recruiting executive.

People can post "blind" résumés, or have replies sent to an e-mail address. But Riley notes that this undercuts the effectiveness of a job search because recruiters may need to reach a job prospect quickly.

"You have to be careful," Riley says. "Use good common sense. Ask yourself, 'do I trust this site?' Be a selective consumer."

One thing missing from the electronic job search, at least in the initial stages, is the personal touch. "It's very impersonal," says Elliott, the executive recruiter. "People send out résumés and never hear anything back. You become just another batch of bits and bytes."

And the very size of the Internet employment market may make it difficult to find sites that will produce the best results. A few years ago Elliott did an Internet search for "executive jobs" and got 8,000 hits. Later the same search produced 20,000 hits and more recently, 1 million hits.

"A lot of it is garbage or duplicative listings," Elliott says. Still, he looks to the Internet to become a dominant forum for filling some kinds of jobs, such as technical positions.

And he predicts that older workers, because their acquired job skills are readily recognized in job data searches, "increasingly will find the Internet is a good place to look for work."

But experts caution people not to overlook the value of two very traditional approches to job hunting: personal contacts and networking in the "hidden" job market where positions are filled without being advertised. "That has always been important," Riley says, "and the Internet will never be a substitute."

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